

INFORMANT: Martin Pietz

INTERVIEWER: Steven Bucklin

DATE: 18 May 1999

SB: [The interviewer Steven Bucklin]

MP: [The informant Martin Pietz]

[Beginning of side one, tape one]

[Interview begins]

SB: This is Steven Bucklin, Assistant Professor of History at the University of South Dakota, uh, conducting an interview at the Hotel Alex Johnson in Rapid City, South Dakota, on the 18th of May 1999 with Martin Pietz. Martin, would you tell us your full name and spell it phonetically?

MP: My name is Martin R. Pietz and it's spelled M-A-R-T-I-N and last name is P-I-E-T-Z.

SB: And your rank at discharge?

MP: My rank was Chief Master Sergeant.

SB: And your unit of assignment?

MP: My unit was the 44th Strategic Missile Wing, or 44th Missile Wing.

SB: Okay. I've got several questions to ask you. Some are of a specific nature, and some are fairly general, so you'll have an opportunity to speak to them all.

MP: Um hmm.

SB: Um, I notice that you've had several different assignments in the Air Force. You were in, uh, when did you join the Air Force?

MP: I joined the Air Force in 1968 and I joined as a jet engine mechanic, so I started out in the aircraft maintenance side.

SB: And where did you first serve?

MP: My first, after completing training, I served in Taiwan at, uh, a place a name I can't pronounce very well. It was Ching Chiang Kang Air Base.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: In Taiwan. And I served there for my first year of service.

SB: And when did you come to Ellsworth Air Force Base?

MP: I came to Ellsworth in 1972 after a short tour in California.

SB: And how long did you remain at Ellsworth?

MP: Uh, from 1972 until I retired in 1994, I was at Ellsworth. Starting out on the aircraft side, I was uh, aircraft from 1972 to 1978 and then retrained into missiles in 1978 and served the rest of my time in missiles.

SB: I note that it says in 1978, uh, that you were in an electro mechanical team.

MP: Yes.

SB: Can you tell us what you did?

MP: Okay. Uh, I started out, uh, well, what an electro mechanical team does is work basically on the electrical and mechanical, it's a combination. Uh, we worked on, I don't how familiar you are with the sites, but the, uh, there were racks of drawers on, in the Launch Facility and Launch Control Facility, and we were basically component replacement on those, uh, what we called racks.

SB: So you worked both in the missile silo itself and in the Launch Control Facility?

MP: True. Yep.

SB: Okay.

MP: Uh, and what we did, other than the racks, we worked on the, uh, the power generation system. And, and it was kind of split up there, too. Uh, the part that was in the Launch Facility, the Launch Control Facility, uh, large batteries and motor generators, we worked on those. Uh, again, a lot of component replacement and, and some repair also.

SB: Okay. Now I recall that private power companies supplied the silos and the launch control facilities both?

MP: Right. Yes. Private power came in, which turned the motor generator. Uh, what came in was sixty cycle power, which is normal household power. Uh, they converted, that powered the motor generator, which converted that power into 400 cycle power, which was better for the instrumentation or something along that line. I'm not sure of all the, the whys, but that's

how the power came in uh to make sure there was an uninterrupted supply. Whenever the power failed, it automatically, there was a sensor in the motor generator, that automatically transferred it to batteries so the power was uninterrupted to the site. After so long, with that ran on batteries, it would convert to a, uh, diesel generator that was located in the, in another building, the soft support building in the Launch Facility and upstairs for the Launch Control Facility.

SB: Okay.

[equipment check]

SB: Uh, when you came to Ellsworth in 1978, you were familiar with South Dakota?

MP: Yes.

SB: You, uh, born in South Dakota?

MP: Yes. I was born and raised in South Dakota. Actually, the only time I wasn't, didn't live in South Dakota, was the four years that I spent going through training and then overseas and California, so pretty much all my life in South Dakota. Yes.

SB: Okay. Uh, I also notice that you were a Facility Branch Superintendent. Is that correct?

MP: That is true.

SB: Can you tell us something about that job?

MP: Okay. Uh, as a Facility Branch Superintendent I had, uh, I had progressed in my career where I was uh, uh in charge of some shops. Uh, the shops were the Facility Maintenance Team's shop. And they pretty much worked on the diesel generator.

SB: And that's located right at the LCF?

MP: At the LCF and at the LF both. Each of them had their own diesel generator that, that supplied the power in the event of power failure.

SB: The maintenance shop itself was located at the LCF?

MP: Oh no. I'm sorry. The maintenance shop itself was on base, uh, and then from there they dispatched out to the, to the various sites that required work.

SB: Okay.

MP: Uh, that was one of the shops. There was, there was a periodic maintenance shop. And what they did was, uh, the inspections on the sites. Every year they would go out and spend an entire day. And they'd go out and change filters and inspect and just a lot of, uh, fix-up type work on the sites. And also, I mean the inspections included things like, uh, air filters, oil filters, just, just basic maintenance.

SB: Um hmm. Okay. And then finally it says that you were in maintenance control and, uh, I think you told me earlier that you were, you ended your career as a maintenance control superintendent?

MP: Yes.

SB: And would describe those responsibilities and duties?

MP: Sure. Uh, and what that entailed was we did a lot of the planning, the scheduling of maintenance that was performed on a, on a daily as well as planning into the future. Uh, job control was another part, another function that, uh, was part of maintenance control. They directed the on-site maintenance, getting teams to and from site, coordinating the maintenance on-site between teams, and any problems that came up they would, they had the maintenance expertise to help out, give them technical advice as well as, uh, dispatch additional parts and equipment that was required to complete the tasks.

SB: Okay. Well, in general, how would you describe your mission?

MP: Our mission, the way we saw it was, even though we were located in the middle of South Dakota, we were defending the United States from Russian aggressors. The Soviet Union, I mean basically, that was it. We were, we were looking at defending, uh, defending our country from the Soviet Union.

SB: And were you responsible then for one flight of the missiles?

MP: Actually, no. Uh, it, we never really split it up by flights. Any, uh, site, be it an LF or LCF, that required maintenance, and it was on a priority basis, you'd work the higher priority jobs, the highest priority being something that was, could cause equipment damage or some injury to people. And then any site that was off alert. And you tried to keep all sites on alert so they were ready to go at all times. So you worked on priority basis. And it wasn't necessarily any specific location.

SB: And that meant you could travel, then, quite a bit?

MP: Yes. That was the part that was probably the hardest to get used to coming into it. Having worked in aircraft all of your maintenance was performed on the flight line. In the missile wing, you found that your flight line was spread through most of western South Dakota, basically. I mean, you travel as far away as, as Faith that were, those were some of our furthest sites, Faith, South Dakota. And that's, I mean it's a two hour drive on a good day and on a bad day it's a lot more than that.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: And you, and you basically travel in all kinds of weather, within reason.

SB: So when you described your mission as the defense of the United States against the Soviet Union, did you, um, did you take from your colleagues as well that, um, your mission was a serious one?

MP: I think all the time. I mean, it was, it was so serious that when you entered a site, it had this, you know it was just a little braided seal that ran around the outside and you had to do a careful inspection of that. And this was in every time you entered that site just to make sure that if there was a, a near nuclear explosion, you had EMPs that the, the electrical currents couldn't penetrate the site. I don't think there, I just didn't ever see it as anything but a serious mission when we were in there.

SB: Did you notice any change in that attitude over the years you were in? Did it seem that maybe people in eighties and, um, early nineties might have changed in their attitude?

MP: I can't say that they really changed. I mean, you know, as you get older you look at younger people and say "Well, they don't maybe have my values," but I think when we got out on site for the most part it was, it was a pretty, pretty serious business. They took it seriously. They, they, they worked hard out there. And, uh, I think if you see, you know, the amount of preparation work, the miles they had to travel to do the jobs, just the process of entering a site where it takes you probably an hour just to get into a site to get ready to go, I mean you had to be serious about it or you just, you just didn't do it for very long.

SB: You grew up in the heart of the Cold War ...

MP: Um hmm.

SB: um, and obviously, the threat of the Cold War was real to you? Did you think that the threat of Soviet missiles, uh, hitting the United States was a real threat?

MP: I really did. I had never, I never doubted for a minute that it wasn't a threat. Uh, you know, up until the time we put all our missiles, we saved all our missiles. And even then, it wasn't real, I mean, you couldn't really do that! So, yeah, absolutely.

SB: Okay.

MP: That was, that was a real threat and a real, real serious situation.

SB: And that sense remained all the way to 1991?

MP: Absolutely. I mean that 1991, it was almost a feeling of "How could you take this away?"

SB: Um hmm.

MP: You know? We just have to have it! And, and, so yes, I would say it was a very real feeling.

SB: Did it bother you at all that the missile system you were supporting, if it were ever used, likely meant the end of life as we know it?

MP: You're torn when you work. I mean you have, uh, exercises where you have scenarios where you have, uh, practice war, in case it, God forbid it ever happened, it wouldn't, you wouldn't sit there and think about "What am I doing, what am I doing?" So, you'd have exercises to get you into the mode. Uh, it's the same as if you're going into battle in the battlefield. You know, you have to, you have to feel like what you're doing is right. And, yeah there were, you know, you'd stop and think about "What am I doing?" Or you'd stop and think about at the end of most of the exercises, it, of course didn't end very well. You know, it ended with certain sites being hit and then eventually the base being taken out. So after, I mean you'd go home that night and you'd think about "Man, what are we doing?" So, yeah, did you ever think? Yeah, absolutely! You tried to stay in the mode. It was your job to have things ready to go and hope it never got used.

SB: Are you married?

MP: Yes I am.

SB: Children?

MP: Yes.

SB: Did you think about it in those terms as well?

MP: I mean, I would think about what would I really do with my family, if, if this, especially when we were doing exercises, because that was when it would bring it home to you. And I would think "What would I do with my family if this was really happening?" I was, I was married for awhile. Then I was a single dad. I had four children that I had to depend on other people to take care of when I was at work. So, I thought about it a lot at times.

SB: I bet. Were there any times from 1978 to 1991 when deactivation begin, and I believe 1993 was the date when we were finally deactivated ...

MP: That's when we took the last, I mean 1993. Maybe it was even early in '94, that we took the last missile out, but ...

SB: Was there any period, or periods, during those fifteen years or so, where you thought it was possible our missiles might be launched?

MP: You know, you'd watch the news and you'd get the secure briefings. And I never really thought that we were, we were really close to launching. But there were times when tensions would rise we'd, when you'd think about it a little bit more and wonder "Is it going to get worse?"

SB: Can you think of any specific times?

MP: Uh, [long pause] I really can't right now.

SB: That's fine. Did you or your colleagues have any second thoughts, you know, at these times of heightened tension?

MP: [chuckles] Uh, I think by the time I got to that point, I was pretty convinced we were doing the right thing. I don't think I had any real second thoughts about what we were doing. What I was doing. I consider it, because we were pretty much all into it together. Uh, you know, like I said, you just hope it doesn't happen, but you felt like you couldn't let down, because if you did let down that might just bring on an attack. You felt like you had to keep everything on alert because the more you had, I mean, you always felt like they were watching you. So you had, you just had to, you just had to keep going, keeping the system up so it, you know, as a defense. To keep everything up.

SB: I want to get back to another question.

MP: Um hmm.

SB: And, um, when you mentioned drills and practices and scenarios in which a, a site might be taken out. One of the ideas behind the Minuteman II system was that some would survive for a nine, up to a nine-week period following a first strike.

MP: Sure.

SB: Do you think that was likely?

MP: Nine weeks? Well, it's, it's possible, you know, if you get the diesels up and running and the diesels held up and everything. Nine weeks is probably a stretch, from what I could see. Uh, certainly a couple weeks wouldn't have been because, I mean, we had times when power would go down and we'd have sites go up on diesel and they ran and ran. You know, other than running out of fuel, as long as you have a good, good diesel running and everything keeps working, uh, a couple weeks, three weeks, even a month probably wouldn't have been a stretch at all. Nine weeks, I think, would have been pretty much outside.

SB: Now the literature that I've read indicates that the Air Force counted on these sites to survive an air burst.

MP: Um hmm.

SB: And do you think that was likely as well?

MP: Uh, within reason. Uh, if you would see the reinforcement. The concrete, the way everything was put together. Now I can't say that I've been, you know, near a blast, so it's all relative.

SB: How about the EMP that you mentioned?

MP: Well, the EMP. If, I mean, if you go down the inside where all the, where all the wiring came into the site, it was, they had little boxes, little filters to take out any EMPs. Inside that room was this big mesh filter, big steel doors. I mean I really believe it could have survived from that standpoint. I mean, and they even ran tests. They would take a site down. They would, uh, subject it to, uh, oh of course they'd take the missile out, and the warhead out, but they would subject it to some unrealistic voltages and things like that. So I mean, they did constant testing and in that respect I have no doubt that it would have survived.

SB: That leads me to another question, too. Um, the Minuteman--was it a good missile?



MP: [laughs] It's the only missile I ever worked on, so I'd have to say it was a good missile!

SB: A great missile, yeah! Did you work on the Minuteman II and III?

MP: Just II.

SB: Just the II? Yea, okay. Um, were you familiar with their Soviet counterparts?

MP: You know, we, we would get some briefings on the missiles, but as far as knowing a lot about them, I probably didn't. We would get some missile, or some briefings on movement of missiles, types of missiles, numbers, uh, you know, warhead sizes and we would get some of that, yes.

SB: But would they brief you on quality?

MP: You know, there'd be talk about quality. But I don't think we got a lot of briefings on, uh. We always considered ours to be more accurate and maybe it was just our way of thinking.

SB: That was my next question. Was there a sense that American technology was superior to the Soviets?

MP: Always. Always. We, we, I think we prided ourselves not only on better technology, but on better practices of maintenance, better quality of work, and just a more sound system. And again, whether that was real or, or we felt that way. But you know it was something that we always strived for.

SB: Does there have to be a sense of survivability?

MP: Oh, absolutely. Or else, or else you don't have a reason for being there. Because if one strike is going to take everything out, you know you can't always get everything off first. So, sure, you have to have a feeling of survivability.

SB: Okay. Um, how was your unit's morale?

MP: Well, I, I, overall I would say good. I would also have to say that I'd seen morale at different levels.

SB: Did it ebb and flow in terms of diplomatic negotiations? In 1978, there were SALT II negotiations, Strategic Arms Limitations Negotiations. Later on there were the START negotiations. How did you and your colleagues respond to efforts to reduce the number of missiles?

MP: You know, it seems like the worse things were in the world, the higher morale was. Because it seemed like a more real sense of mission.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: Uh, as far as the, the SALT talks, I don't remember it affecting me that much. I have, in '78 I was training into the system and I got to Ellsworth in, it was about the first of November. So in all honesty, I didn't, didn't get that much from it with, uh, that was SALT. The START, I remember the START talks kind of bothering me because I can remember them talking about places that the Soviet visitors would come to inspect. And in, there were some pretty sensitive areas ...

SB: How did you feel about that, when the Soviets came to visit?

MP: [laughter] I never actually saw the Soviets come, but I'll tell you what. It was just, you have to remember that you have this, they are the enemy and you would never allow them even close to some of these places. And now, we're looking to bring them in, to show them around, and it was, uh, such a new way of thinking that, uh, it's hard to accept.

SB: Were you as a maintenance person, were you screened psychologically?

MP: Actually, yes. We were on what was called, uh, PRP or HR, it started out HRP and went to PRP, which is Personnel Reliability Program. So yeah, they were, anytime you went to the doctor, anytime you received medication, they would look at it in relation to "Is this going to effect your ability to reason, to think clearly" and so forth. And if the answer was "yes," then you were taken off of the program for whatever amount of time you were taking medications or for whatever amount of time that you were having as much as a personal problem. So yeah, it was, there was a lot of screening in that respect, uh ...

SB: Did you ever be, were you ever taken off?

MP: For medication, um hmm, sure. Anytime you took like a painkiller, anything like that. Uh, I had, uh, you know, oral surgery to my, you know, to the mouth, and you take painkillers for that, you'd be taken off.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: So I mean it was, it wasn't, uh, a negative to be taken off, it was just, but it was a protective.

SB: It was a standard operating procedure apparently.

MP: Absolutely. Um hmm.

SB: Were there people taken off for, uh, psychological reasons?

MP: There were. I, I can remember people that had marital problems and being taken off for weeks at a time while they resolved the, you know, the problems. A sickness in the family, you can be taken off. There was just, for whatever reason, if you, if you felt like you couldn't function, you were supposed to tell someone and if a supervisor noticed someone that they felt like was, was just too troubled to, uh, to uh go and do the job and, you know, where you could really rely on them.

SB: Were you asked to be aware of your ...

MP: All the time.

SB: peers?

MP: All the time. Peers, uh, subordinates, uh superiors alike. You were supposed to be, you know, be on the lookout for those things. Yes.

SB: Okay. Did you have, did anybody ever lose it?

MP: [chuckle] Ah, no. I can't say that anyone really ever just, just lost it. But I mean, with the number of people that come through, I mean you meet some people that aren't always one hundred percent stable, I suppose.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: Um, in general, they're weeded out because they have problems and, and just. It was a pretty, it was a pretty demanding job. It was, uh, it was a schedule that not many people really enjoyed. So, there was a lot of, you know, at times there were, there was a lot of, uh, uh discontent with that, which caused problems. And then when that, when that festered, then they were usually removed.

SB: I want to talk a little bit about the schedule then.

MP: [laughter]

SB: And, and apparently, you must have thrived on it! You stayed in!

MP: I stayed in and sometimes I, I look back. Actually, the schedule wasn't so bad. When you were dispatching, it was pretty hectic. You would normally go out one day, uh, a day was up to sixteen hours. And that would be

preparation, travel, work, travel back, uh, download all your equipment, get everything put away. If it went over that, if it got to fifteen, you couldn't drive anymore and they had the launch control facilities stationed throughout, so whichever one you were closest to, you were diverted in and you spent the night there and slept and then came back. So you worked one day ...

SB: That would be the RON? The rest-over-night?

MP: That would be RON! There you go!

SB: Ah ha!

MP: So you worked one day, you had the next day off then. Well, if you happened to work too late and your next day off you had spent that night in the field, then you'd get home the following afternoon or maybe, if you're lucky by noon, and then the next day you'd be in again. So ...

SB: Can you give us some idea of the frequency you'd be called on site, either to an LF or an LCF?

MP: Generally, you were, your schedule would come out a month in advance and you'd be scheduled for so many days per month and those would be the days you'd go out. And then it was determined just which jobs you would go out to.

SB: And was that for a sort of regular maintenance schedule?

MP: Regular maintenance, yes.

SB: But then you could be called out to ...

MP: Oh absolutely. I mean, I remember Thanksgiving Day, and I wish I could remember the year, but we had more work than we could handle. And basically we were all in there working, trying to get some work accomplished. And what it was, was at this particular time was we had more security work than what we should have had. Security problems caused a camper team to be out on site, and that would be a small camper with two security policemen inside, so it was decided that we needed to work on Thanksgiving Day to try to get some of those problems taken care of, try to get some of those guys home. When in the meantime that, all of us basically lost Thanksgiving. But I mean, it was, it was an effort to get something done. But yeah, I mean, you could be called out anytime.

SB: Now, when maintenance personnel were called out, did you, were you accompanied by other personnel?

MP: Anytime you went on to a Launch Facility you were, you were accompanied by security police.

SB: And that would always be at least two?

MP: Yea. It started out as one and then it ended up as two. Uh, when I started dispatching, it was just one security police person.

SB: Um, another question comes to mind, and again from literature I have read, uh, the Minuteman II, would you describe it as a low maintenance, medium maintenance, or high maintenance piece of equipment?

MP: [laughter] I would have to say that it was fairly high maintenance. You have to keep in mind the age of the system. We had when I came into it the oldest system. And of course, it didn't get any younger as I stayed in it. So, there was a lot of maintenance just to keep it going, but we were also doing some upgrades as we went along. I would consider it a pretty high maintenance system.

SB: One of the reasons, I read, for the Air Force to want to go to the Minuteman III was the cost of maintaining the Minuteman II. Would you say that was true?

MP: I would have to say it was. I mean, I never worked on the Minuteman III, but just from the cross feed I've gotten with other maintenance people that were in Minuteman III, definitely lower maintenance. We did some upgrades that, like when we changed the guidance control section. That was one of the upgrades we did in the time I was there. Definitely helped as far as the maintenance requirements.

SB: The Minuteman II was a single bomb?

MP: Yes, it was.

SB: And average size?

MP: I don't, they didn't talk about average size. I know it was in the kiloton range, but I think it was something around two-and-one-half kilotons.

SB: Did you know the kind of damage that kind of warhead could cause?

MP: [laughs] Yeah.

SB: Did you?

MP: Yeah.

SB: And give us an idea.

MP: I mean it would, you know ...

SB: What would it do to Rapid City?

MP: It would basically wipe out Rapid City.

SB: Okay. Uh, couple other questions and I'm going to move to a different sort of area.

MP: Okay.

SB: One, in uh 1974, the Secretary of Defense was very concerned about the stability of President Nixon ...

MP: Um hmm.

SB: ...prior to his resignation. And in fact, issued a directive that any order coming from the president had to bear his counter-signature. Uh, were there, or can you imagine a scenario where you would refuse orders?

MP: I can't imagine one, but I can't say that it could never happen either. But I mean, for the time that I spent there, uh, I don't, you know I just don't recall a time that I would have said "No, I just can't do that." I mean we ...

SB: Was that something anybody ever discussed?

MP: Not, no. Not, not in my presence.

SB: Okay. Another question was that, uh, the Air Force, uh, maintains that the lids were never blown off any of the silos other than one test. Is that the case to your knowledge?

MP: Oh yeah. There were never any uh, I mean it was a pretty safe system. When you look at it, especially in relation to the Titan system, where they had the really volatile liquid fuels, we were lucky in that respect. But the worst thing we did was, you know, we cleaned up our, out bodies a little bit out there, but never had any real what I would even call a close call out there, you know, in the time I was here.

- SB: You know something that I am curious about, too, from the moment that the two capsule crewmen turned their keys, how long before that missile, that bird is in the air?
- MP: Well, it was about sixty seconds. It was a Minuteman.
- SB: So that truly meant ...
- MP: Yep.
- SB: Wow!
- MP: And that's depending on a lot of things, including that was supposed to go first. I mean there were, they had time-on-target, they had so many different scenarios where, but yeah, it was, it was out of there in no time. I mean, we ran tests, uh, where we disconnected all the ordnance and then we'd go through the key turns and you could see, uh, we would have the leads hooked up to test devices. And I mean, it was, it was within a minute, you know, you were ...
- SB: Did you ever see a bird in flight?
- MP: Uh, I saw several birds in flight. I had the opportunity to go out to, uh, California.
- SB: California. Vandenberg?
- MP: Vandenberg! Thank you!
- SB: You're welcome. [laughter]
- MP: I had the opportunity to go out there and we took a bird out for a test flight. I got to watch a Titan go, a couple Minuteman IIs go.
- SB: You watched a Titan go?
- MP: Yes. It was not a, uh, Titan war bird. It was a, uh, it was a Titan IV. They had a technical ...
- SB: Was it for satellites?
- MP: It was a satellite bird, um hmm. So I got to watch a Titan go up. Unfortunately, it was, it was too bright. It was during the daytime. If it had been a little darker, I think it would have been more spectacular. But yea, I did get to see a Titan go.

SB: What kind of thought when you watched one of the Minutemen go?

MP: Oh it was so impressive because you work on them all those years and you never get, you know. You work on it basically. Airplanes you work on, you watch it fly, it comes back, you fix it. Missiles, you fix it. And you fix it. And you fix it. [laughter] But ...

SB: So there had to be a sense of satisfaction.

MP: Oh absolutely. Unfortunately, the bird that I took out there didn't fly. It had a, it had a real short flight. It uh, it went up and the guidance system shut down and it was destroyed in flight. So that was probably the high point and the low point in my career! [laughter]

SB: Could those missiles be destroyed in flight anytime if they ...

MP: No. The test birds could.

SB: But not the ...

MP: Not the live ones.

SB: Alert live ones.

MP: Yea. They put, uh, a destruct package on the test birds. It was something that they just mounted to a normal missile. And the reason they did that was because of the, you're in a populated area and if the thing decided to go east instead of west, it was coming across the United States. Even though it didn't have a warhead on it, it could certainly ...

SB: Cause damage?

MP: Cause damage.

SB: So once those two keys were turned, we were irrevocably committed?

MP: Uh, from a, yeah. There was no, I mean once you had key turns, other than, you know short of, of parking a vehicle over the launch door. And that was there in case of a situation where, uh, perhaps, you know worst possible scenario, you had someone down in a Launch Control Facility getting ready to launch a bird that, uh, wasn't supposed to be launched. You parked a vehicle over the blast door and then let the vehicle go down on top of the missile so it couldn't come out.

SB: Hmm. Okay. Uh, so the missiles--what we had 450?



MP: We had 150 missiles here.

SB: Okay. Uh, when those were all pulled out as a result of the end of the Cold War, how did you feel?

MP: [laughs] I could only liken it to when I was a, when I was a youngster I grew up on a farm. And all I knew was farming. And then, I was the younger of a large family and when I was fourteen years old, my parents sold the family farm and we moved to town. And I could liken it to that, but it was just a really empty feeling. And it's, it's crazy when I think back on it. I mean here is a, uh, weapon of mass destruction that I was trying to protect and keep into service and when it was gone I missed it! Yeah.

SB: So there was an emotional commitment?

MP: Yeah. Absolutely! Absolutely!

SB: Well, you spent fifteen years working on them. So do you think it was militarily justified?

MP: Making it? Or taking it out?

SB: Removing them.

MP: Yes. I think it was, you know, looking back on it now that I've had some time to think clearly on it, it definitely. I mean I like the direction that we're headed.

SB: Okay. What do you think about the debate over antiballistic missile systems right now?

MP: I'm very much in favor of anti ballistic missiles, missile systems. For the plain fact that, although we have a lot of warning systems, we have absolutely nothing to stop a missile coming in. And, you know, whether the, the Soviet Union is a threat, or Viet, uh, some other nation that gets the technology, talking about China with their, with their advanced missile technology now, I think it would be great. Because I would feel a whole lot more secure. But again, having gone through those scenarios where the missiles are coming in and you kind of, uh, you think about it a lot.

SB: You think ABMs could encourage first strike at all?

MP: Do I think so? No. I think it, even though, I think it's a defense system. There are so many, or there were so many missiles in the Soviet Union's arsenal, I wouldn't ever want to rely on that as a sole defense. I mean, as a onesy, twoesy thing, I think it's, you know, it's something that's realistic

to stop the renegade that might launch a missile. If it ever came to all-out war, you couldn't have a good enough, uh, system because if one got through, it would be too many.

SB: Do we have in place defensive measures against missiles, whether they're from Peoples' Republic of China or the former Soviet Union?

MP: If we do, I sure don't know about it.

SB: Okay. Um, one of the worst experiences I suppose anyone in the military can have is if somebody dies in the line of duty. Did anyone die during your ...

MP: We had, uh, security policemen that were killed in a helicopter crash in, actually I don't remember the year now. It was probably right around, it was the late '80s to early '90s I suppose. That was, I mean I didn't know these people personally, but a really sad situation 'cause they were doing the same thing we were doing.

SB: No maintenance personnel involved?

MP: Uh, not in the line of duty, no.

SB: Okay.

MP: We were really lucky that it's not the same case in all units.

SB: Would you attribute that to good training?

MP: I'd like to. I would hope it would be from, uh, from, we had good training. And, uh, for the most part, we were pretty safe out there.

SB: Okay. Um, we established earlier that your duty took you all over western South Dakota pretty much.

MP: Um hmm.

SB: Um, describe for people who aren't from western South Dakota, what the terrain is like.

MP: Well, it goes from the beauty of the Black Hills to Mud Butte. [laughter] And Mud Butte is about as pretty as the, as the name implies. [laughter] It, I mean you have a, you have a spring day where you could travel anywhere in western South Dakota and I would enjoy it. The grass is getting green, the birds are out, and it's just a pretty day to be out. But you go out in the middle of winter, there are places between Sturgis and Belle

Fourche and, and Faith where, I mean you just have miles and miles of, of pretty much nothing. And just snow drifting across. So it can be a really long trip out under some, um, cold and treacherous conditions. It just, it's a lot of, uh, lot of effort just to get where you start your job.

SB: Ever get caught in a blizzard?

MP: I, I got caught in a couple blizzards where I ended up spending the night at the Launch Control Facility. I never was stranded between and we had people that were stranded in, uh, on Launch Facilities where there's really no place to sleep. You're pretty much in your vehicles. So, I mean we had people that worked with me that were stuck that way and it's ...

SB: Were you adequately equipped for that kind of ...

MP: We had really, we had really good survival kits that they sent out with us which contained uh, heating devices, uh, we had a real heavy sleeping bags, food, always carried water with us. So I mean it wasn't a matter of you're going to starve to death or you're going to freeze to death if you get out there. I think it was more a matter of inconvenience. The family was at a home. And if you can, you sure wanted to get home.

SB: And I'm out here.

MP: And I'm out here.

SB: Okay. How many people in a maintenance crew?

MP: It varied with the type of maintenance crew. The majority of them had two people, and that was like the electromechanical teams had two people, the facility maintenance teams had two people. Then if you got into the periodic maintenance team, that was a five person team. The missile maintenance team was a five person team. So it depended on what specialty you had.

SB: And did you work on the guidance control systems?

MP: I didn't. No.

SB: Did other maintenance personnel or was that a special ...?

MP: Yes. That, no, we had maintenance personnel that worked only the guidance control system. The ones in the field actually just did removal and replacement. And then there was some work done on the base. And that was more just minor work. The actual, the gyros and the internal components, was all done at a depot, so we didn't get into to that.

SB: Okay. Uh, well, we talked about South Dakota winters, what about South Dakota summers?

MP: Well, it can be pretty hot, so, I mean you go out there and if you forget to take your water along, it can be a pretty long day out there. [laughter] And there's, there are no facilities on the Launch Facilities. There was no restroom facilities, there's no water, so you're pretty much on your own and you had whatever you'd taken with you.

SB: No air conditioning?

MP: No air conditioning. [laughter]

SB: Well, I suppose it was cool down the tube.

MP: It is cool down there. It's more the topside maintenance that you have to deal with, where it gets pretty warm.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: Right.

SB: Launch facilities ever compromised due to environmental concerns? High water tables? Uh floods?

MP: We had a site with, before I got here, that did flood. But I, you know, I'd speak on it, but I don't know anything about it other than to know that we had one site that the water came up and got onto a missile where they had to remove the missile. In the time I was here, we had problems with water coming up. I mean there was a pump in the bottom of the very bottom of the tube. And in one, my first specialty, we did work on that. Um, so if you got water, you basically took a big pump set-up out there. A glorified sump pump. Like in a house. Drop a large tube down, pump out all the water that was in there and then you would go down and repair the pump that was on site until it was able to, uh, to recover. Anytime, I mean we had alarms on the site, so anytime you got, you had a flooding alarm, if you couldn't get in to fix it immediately, you had twenty-four hour water checks. Someone had to go back in every twenty-four hours just to make sure there wasn't water seeping in at the site that would, uh, compromise it.

SB: For how long?

MP: Until we got it fixed.

SB: Until you got it fixed.

MP: Yeah. So I mean, it was, it was, so you put a lot of priority on getting it fixed because if you had to send a team out every day just to look down into it, into the tube, it wasn't real productive work.

SB: Did you personally get stuck on site because of weather?

MP: Uh, I got stuck onto a Launch Control Facility, but not on a Launch Facility.

SB: Not on an LF.

MP: Not on an LF. Yeah.

SB: Um, any interesting encounters with animals?

MP: Uh, other, snakes I think are the only thing I really ran into out there. And the ...

SB: And that would be what kind of snake?

MP: Actually I was lucky. It was just bull snakes. I mean, uh, some people got, you know, had some rattler encounters.

SB: Anybody get bitten?

MP: No. Nope.

SB: So any antelope? Deer? [laughter] This is after all where the antelope play!

MP: They were always getting in the way of those trucks! [laughter] No, occasionally they would. I mean it wasn't just deer and antelope. I remember one guy that took a cow out. It was, it was a dark night, it was a dark road, and it was a black cow. And by the time he saw it, he just wasn't able to stop. So I mean, yeah, we did, you know, we hit, uh, animals, we hit buildings at times. Traveling that many miles, sure we had, we had some vehicular mishaps.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: I can recall a time that one, one vehicle rolled and one of the, uh, passengers in the vehicle was fairly seriously injured. I mean, uh, broken, broken leg type injury, so.

SB: What kind of vehicles did they give you?

MP: Uh, we called them "u" vans, utility vans. Um, I would, it's like a, probably a three-quarter ton pick-up with a utility box on the back. Lots of little compartments.

SB: Sort of like a commercial utility vehicle?

MP: Exactly. Uh, a lot like a telephone truck with all the little side compartments and back compartment. And we had the larger vehicles. I mean, and again, it would depend on, on your job for the day. Uh, if you had something that where you had to penetrate the launch tube, you took a larger vehicle.

SB: Were they four-wheel drive?

MP: Uh, the majority of them weren't. Very, very few. We had a few pick-ups that were four-wheel drive. We usually would send those out in the more severe weather. If we had something that we could get a small load on, we would send out four-wheel drives. But the majority of the vehicles were not.

SB: Okay. Back to the animals. Did the birds ever cause any problem? Nesting in antennas? Or, you know? [laughter]

MP: I can't personally recall any, but I mean there were, you were always trying to, to shoo birds off the site. They would nest right on the site. Especially birds that would nest in dirt. They would nest right there on site because they were never, they weren't disturbed probably three hundred days out of the year, so it was a pretty nice place to uh ...

SB: And could they set off alarms?

MP: Uh, yea. Rabbits would come in and set off alarms. There were, yeah, there were often nuisance alarms like that.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: Um hmm.

SB: You say often?

MP: I mean, well, and we didn't have to respond to them as often as the security police people did. But they would go out and respond and then we would go out after the fact to try and determine what it was. And a lot of times it was just, uh, rabbits, or night animals that would kind of disturb the site.

SB: Coyote?

MP: Um hmm.

SB: Okay. How were your relations with the people of South Dakota? With the ranchers? With the people in Rapid City?

MP: I always thought the relations were pretty good. You always had a , you know, you'd drive through a town and there would be a teenager that probably didn't think real highly of you and would maybe give you a comment. Uh, occasionally, there were ranchers that, uh, that would kind of, that were not as friendly as others. But for the most part, I, you know, as you, as you would drive across, a rancher's typical wave, you'd still get that. So, I think for the most part it was pretty good.

SB: How about for your comrades who were not from South Dakota?

MP: This, this can be kind of, I think, culture shock. Especially people that come from a larger city. Because, I can, I can always remember the comment, "But there's no night life here." [laughter] I don't know. Ah ...

SB: The comment we always hear in Vermillion is "There's no ethnic food!"

MP: [laughter] Well, there's a little bit of that here.

SB: Um, were there any demonstrations against the missile sites?

MP: Well, there were a couple at Easter on a site over by Kadoka. They had, um, a small group that wanted to place Easter lilies on the, on the site, which caused a problem because we didn't allow civilians to come onto the site. So, yeah, there was, I mean it was, it was all pretty peaceful in relation to what you think of as a demonstration. But you know, just small stuff like that.

SB: South Dakotans are pretty well behaved. [laughter]

MP: Yeah, they are.

SB: Did you, uh, were you aware of media coverage? Not just in terms of this, uh, Easter demonstration, but media coverage of the missiles. Did you ...

MP: We didn't have a lot of coverage. You know, it's a funny thing, because all the time I spent before I went into missiles, it's kind of low-scale, kind of low key. I don't think it really received all that much attention until they were talking about taking it out. That was probably the most media

coverage we had gotten, was when they started talking about deactivation and then we had some camera crews come out and, excuse me, do some things. But other than that, you know, most of my memory's fading. I don't remember a whole lot of media coverage during the, just the normal day-to-day activities.

SB: Okay. Uh, how were race relations within the unit?

MP: Race relations I thought were pretty good. You know, race relations, I have to go back to when I came into the service, probably aren't exactly the same as they are today. I could remember a time, this was before I came here, but overseas when we had a little demonstration. It was like the middle of the night where there was some, there were some problems. And, and, we know, we had the police out and we had people throwing things. So in the early '70s, I came in in '68, and in the early '70s, things were really very unsettled. It was just not a real fun time, because, it was funny 'cause you could have a black friend at work, but then when you got off work, he went with his black friends and you went with your white friends and, and if you saw each other on the street, you didn't, didn't say a whole lot. And I think over the years, I mean, the Air Force did a lot to sensitize the various people about, just to teach you the differences between the thought processes. The difference between the cultures. So you could, it wasn't something so strange you didn't have to be afraid of it. It was something that, it's just a little bit different, but there still very much the same as we all are.

SB: You mentioned specifically blacks and white relations. How about Hispanic and white relations? Or Hispanic and black? Or Native American?

MP: You know, the number of Native Americans I served with was so small that I don't have a real, I can remember one that, I met him in tech school my first time through for air craft and he was from Huron, South Dakota. But, I mean, other than that, I just, I just don't recall, oh there was one other guy I worked with a little bit later on from Minnesota. I never really noticed any, any strain in relation between, it was just, it was black and white. That was the only ...

SB: How about the Native American community outside of the military? Many of these missiles are on, um, Native reservations. Any tension with Native Americans over the missile sites?

MP: If there was, I've missed it. But I don't think there was at all. I, I don't, I think that the Native Americans not only out on the reservations, but here in town got along pretty well with the, uh, military people.



SB: Okay. Something else I want to get back to. When you, uh, were talking about the difference between being in the missile business and being in the airplane business ...

MP: Yes.

SB: and that the media, there was a sense that they really weren't paying much attention, you know?

MP: Um hmm.

SB: Did you have a sense that, um, as someone in the missile business there was, um, a sort of second class citizenship in the Air Force?

MP: [laughs] Yeah.

SB: You were in both, right?

MP: Yeah.

[side one ends]

[beginning side two]

SB: And this is side two of the interview with Martin Pietz. Um ,we were talking about relations, race relations, um, whether within the military or between the military and civilians in South Dakota. Uh, I noted that you entered service at Ellsworth, I believe in 1972, is that correct?

MP: I actually, well, I entered service in 1968, but I came to Ellsworth ...

SB: In '72.

MP: Yes.

SB: Yeah. Uh, were you there before the Rapid Flood?

MP: Two. I got here two weeks before the Rapid Flood.

SB: So, tell me, were you involved then in aiding the community?

MP: I wasn't. And that was, and that was something that was a little bit disturbing about my job at that time. I got here in 1972. The Vietnam War was going on. We were supplying jet engines for aircraft that were flying in Southeast Asia. We were scheduled to come into work the morning of the flood, and we came in that morning and they let us off for that day, but we

had to go right back in and we never really got, had the opportunity to get involved with the, with any of the clean-up that came after because we were basically working twelve hours a day, six days a week to try and meet the mission that we had at the time. So, no.

[interruption]

SB: Uh, were there any people in the 44th involved in aiding the community at that time?

MP: When I, at the time of the flood, I was in the 28th, uh, 28th Bomb Wing, so as far as, I don't know of any that were. I know we lost some people from the 28th Bomb Wing in the flood. Uh, we lost a couple different people. But it was, it was, it so changed Rapid City that we had just found our way around, you know, getting in and out of town, and, uh, it so changed it that it was like a different town. You had to take all these detours to get through, the majority of the bridges were washed out. Wherever Rapid Creek, uh, wherever there was a bridge across Rapid Creek, was pretty much taken out.

SB: Did you live on base at that time?

MP: I did. I lived on the base at that time. Yes.

SB: And moved off of base when?

MP: Uh, in 1983. Lived on base for the majority of the time I was here.

SB: Okay. A question that's on the minds, I am sure, of many people, uh, even to this day, is the role of women in the armed forces. And I notice that the first female Minuteman crew member, uh, was selected in October of 1985. And the first mixed gender missile crew debuted in August of 1989.

MP: Um hmm.

SB: Did you have any feelings about the decision to go coed, as it were?

MP: We had females in maintenance well before that. So by that, by that time, I didn't have any problem with it. I've worked with women in the service, keeping in mind that I came in again in 1968 and at that time they were distinguished, basically had their own Air Force. They were called WAFS, Women's Air Force, at that time. Uh, and then it all changed over the years. And we had enough women in maintenance by the time they had women in crews that we'd pretty much gotten past the, the men and women thing. I mean, we had very, very capable women working on the maintenance teams that were every bit as good as the men. So, by the

time they had women on the crews, it didn't seem like probably as much of a big deal to us as it did to them since they were just getting the women there.

SB: So should women serve in combat?

MP: That's a good question. Um, when I was in the service, I was, I probably, I felt it was okay. But as I have daughters that are growing up and in their early twenties, I'm not so sure it's such a great idea.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: So it depends on your perspective.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: From the perspective is "Can they handle it?" Sure. Uh, do I think it's a great idea? Not really.

SB: How about gays?

MP: Gays? I'm, I'm sure that in my time in the service I worked with gays. Uh, I wasn't real crazy about the idea. I think I've mellowed over the years and I don't have a problem with it. There was a time when maybe I wasn't quite so, uh, so liberal on the matter, but I think it's alright.

SB: Um, would you agree then with the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy? Or should it just be open? That if you're homosexual, that you should be able to enlist and serve?

MP: "Don't ask, don't tell" doesn't really solve anything. I, personally, I think it should be just, it just should be an open issue. It's, if it's there it's there. I mean, the military is pretty much a cross-section of our society, be it race, sex, I mean, I just think it should be an open issue.

SB: You got any feeling about, um, universal military service?

MP: Universal mil, I'm not real crazy about that. I'm pretty much, I grew up in the United States Air Force. So [laughter], uh, you know ...

SB: No. By universal, I meant all Americans having to serve.

MP: Oh, I'm sorry! I was thinking more of a United Nation Force.

SB: We can get, we can ask that question too! [laughter]

MP: Uh, as far as everyone serving, you know, I think it would just really be a good thing. I, I know that when I entered the service I was, I thought I was pretty grown up, but I was pretty immature. And, and it gives you a place to be and it's something to do. Uh, a roof over your head. Uh, you, they might work you a little too hard, and they might treat you a little too rough. But basically, you have some guidance, some structure. And as I watch some of the, the people that, uh, come out of high school don't necessarily have a direction, I think it would give you something, a base to start on. So, yeah, having served as many years as I did in the service, I don't think it would hurt anyone to serve two, two-three years in a, if it's not in the military, if they have, you know, a real problem with that, there are certainly parks and other things I think that could, uh, could use a little bit of attention, a little bit of ...

SB: You served both during a time of the draft and during time of the all volunteer military.

MP: Right. Um hmm.

SB: Do you, do you notice a qualitative difference?

MP: I think there was a, a higher quality of, uh, of enlistees after the draft. When I went in, I mean the draft was in full swing and I think a lot of the people that I served with in the beginning were, were there because if they weren't there, they'd have been in the Army or in the Marines and on to probably hand-to-hand combat. Or at least off, off to the field. So, yes, I think it was, the Air Force was a way to avoid that. Um ...

SB: So let me get you straight. You think that there was a higher quality during the draft or?

MP: After. I'm just saying that during the draft, I think, uh, a lot of people came in because they thought they were going to get drafted if they didn't. After the draft, I think it was people that actually wanted to. Uh, a lot of people came in because they wanted to get an education. They used the GI Bill or whatever that was in place at the time to help them. So I mean, these were people that I think were ambitious. Were hardworking. Uh, people that were pretty bright. Pretty sharp.

SB: Okay. Well let's ask the question, then, about the UN force. Um, what do you think about what's going on with NATO and the American Air Force?

MP: Well, I, that's, that's a second Vietnam, or it feels like it to me! I mean you're in, in a country where there's a civil strife and although the Serbs have handled it poorly, you still have two factions from the same country that are fighting against each other. We've taken sides and, and we'll just

have to see how we can get out of it. So, in regards to a, a NATO force, I think a NATO force can do good things. I think a UN force can do good things. As long as you can, the country can withdraw their troops when they feel like it's not going the way, the way it should go, or the way that, uh, your country feels like it should go.

SB: Do you feel any threat that nuclear weapons could be brought to bear in the Balkans?

MP: Uh, probably earlier in the, in this particular crisis I thought there was more of a chance than I do now. We have bombed so many targets after so many days, I feel like if they were going to use them, they probably would have used them by now.

SB: And by they you mean the Russians?

MP: Yeah.

SB: Okay. Well, that was a nice little aside. [laughter] Let's get, we'll go back to our, uh, our business at hand. Did you have any shortages, uh, in terms of maintenance equipment? I mean, or in terms of personnel? Uh, problems that attended your specific duties?

MP: You know, we had little shortages, but it wasn't usually something that you couldn't get around. If it was something really serious, they pretty much got us what we needed.

SB: So what might be the longest period of time, uh, a missile might be down?

MP: Well, uh, for parts it usually, it usually wasn't, normally, if it went down, it was a next day fix. If it went down and it looked like there could be damage to the system, it was an immediate fix. Priority one, priority two. I mean it was prioritized that way. Uh, but usually, with an exception for a really bad blizzard that came through here and knocked down a bunch of power at one point where we lost a lot of sites. With that, you know, aside from that ...

SB: Do you remember when that was?

MP: Uh, I would say 1987? 1989?

SB: Late '80s?

MP: Late '80s.

SB: Okay.

MP: Um, had a really bad spring blizzard came through and knocked out a lot of power. The diesels didn't respond as well as we wished they would and I think we lost about sites then. So, other than that time, usually within a day or two days or if it was something really serious, it could go maybe a week, but a week was high. Real high.

SB: Well, one question that's always dear to the hearts of people in the military is, how was the food?

MP: [laughs] I've seen that change too! I mean, you have to remember the amount of time, twenty-six years in the service, we came to expect a lot more quality in the end. Uh, the food was really very good. I mean in relation to, to the way you think of military chow, I mean, it became, it was like eating in a cafeteria. I mean, it pretty much had, the selection was good, the quality was good. I mean, even out on the Launch Control Facilities ...

SB: That was my next question. How about when you had those rest-over-nights?

MP: The food wasn't the problem, trust me! It never, I was never upset with the food. I'm, I'm a lover of food. I eat too much. And, and the meals were really very good. I mean in that respect, I thought they treated us very well.

SB: Well, you've given me a lead in here. What was the problem?

MP: You [laughs] keep in mind that the time I'm, by the time I got in the missile system I'm in my twenties and the sleeping facilities out there were such that, I mean it was just bunk beds. In a room, say, twelve-by-twelve, you've probably got three bunk beds with two beds on it. So, I mean you get in with a lot of people and that, you're not used to sleeping with other people, so you wouldn't get a good night's sleep. Uh, it just was not. And it was, part of it was just a thing that you wanted to be at home. I mean ...

SB: Did they have personal items for you? Or did you pack ...

MP: We packed it.

SB: a ditty bag?

MP: Yeah. You packed a ditty bag. And every time you went out, you were supposed to take your shaving gear, your, and your toothpaste and your toothbrush. And the smart ones did it and the other ones suffered. [laughter] But no, they didn't have personal items. You were even

supposed to take your own towel. So, the only thing they furnished was sheets as far as bedding goes. And I mean, they had showers, shower facilities and everything else. And then the meals. I mean, if you forgot to take money for meals, they would allow you to charge and then pay them back.

SB: Food was good out there?

MP: Food was good.

SB: How were the FMs?

MP: The FMs were, they were good. They, I mean, they wanted you to, to pick up behind yourself and they wanted you to clean up behind yourself. They had, they had a pretty, pretty rough job out there, but they were, they were okay.

SB: Recreational facilities?

MP: Yep. They had pool, there were pool tables, ping pong tables, uh, television, VCR. Uh, usually by the time you got into a Launch Control Facility, you were pretty much whipped. You know, if you just got, if you could just get a good, good meal, sit down for a bit and go to bed, that was, that was, that was about it. That's all you ...

SB: And what would be the longest period of time you'd stay at an LCF?

MP: Um. Weather, weather permitting it was usually just over night.

SB: Uh-hum.

MP: I mean, if you went out on a job that took longer than that, you could, you could spend a couple nights in a row out there.

SB: We've gotten a sense that there was some friendly, um, um, tension between, uh, security police and maintenance. Can you elaborate on that?

MP: Well, you know, it was, that you each had your own mission to do and you each thought that your mission was more important than the other, so yeah. [Laughter.] You picked on each other a little bit. You know, you'd have the guard in the truck, and you'd give him a hard time, and he'd give you a hard time. And, it just, I don't know, it was, it was just a little thing that was going on. There was nothing real serious about it.

SB: Yeah. What did you do to relieve the tension?

MP: Oh...

SB: Play any games on each other?

MP: [Laughter.] Keep in mind I came in to the system when I was older. So, I probably didn't have as much fun with it as some of the younger guys did. I, I just, I can't recall any.

SB: We had one fellow tell us, that they'd leave bird seed, uh, near the OZs. [Laughter.] So that the security police would have to come, as a result of the birds feeding. [laughter]

MP: That's a good one.

SB: What was a typical alert like for you?

MP: Well, now an alert, uh, you're talking about an alert where we had, uh, went through the scenarios of?

SB: Uh-Uh.

MP: Okay. It would start out with a phone call. And they would tell you to report to work immediately. You'd come in and you'd sign into whatever your duty section was at that time. And then you went through the process of generating any off-alert sorties, so immediately you would find out what jobs are there and start to prepare for those particular jobs to get every site onto alert. Including, we'd always have one that was called the Training Launch Facility, that had a, uh, a dummy warhead on it, and part of that alert was to generate that with a real bomb. So it was, it was a time of tension but it was a time of, some of your more rewarding times. I mean, you just go out there and get that job done. Yeah, I got that one. You know, it was, it was kind of a good feeling, but. Uh, so you, you'd, I kind of got off on a tangent there. Uh, a normal alert, you'd come in, you'd get your job and you would go out and you would just continue to do that until you had everything on alert. Everything generated up to where you wanted it.

SB: About how frequently would these alerts...

MP: We usually, oh usually there were probably a couple a year. It seems like, it seems like it was happening all the time, but it was probably only a couple times a year. And then whenever you'd have an inspection team come in, excuse me, they would, that would be part of their inspection, would be to generate, so you'd do that for them also.



SB: Would you have been a capsule crew member if you could have been?

MP: No. [Laughter.] I mean, you talk about the rivalry between security policemen and maintenance, I mean, there was, there was always the whole thing between the capsule crew members and maintenance. So uh, uh, just the amount of time they had to spend down in that hole, I mean, they did twenty-four hour shifts. You know, they came in one day, and they spent a full twenty-four hours, then they went home. I don't know that they had a worse schedule than we did, but I just, the time I spent on the launch control facility was always time I was wantin' to leave. So, I, I was, I would not be the one to, uh, to want to be a, a crew member.

SB: Now you mentioned a little rivalry between the capsule crew...

MP: Oh, just I mean, you know, it was just the, there wasn't anything serious there either. It was just you always felt like you probably did a little bit more than they did. Nothing big, they probably felt the same way. You know their job was just a little bit more important than yours was.

SB: What did you think about that escape tube that they had?

MP: [Laughter.] I'll tell you what, I wouldn't want to depend on that to save my life.

SB: When we went down to look at it, we kept thinking "Wouldn't the heat turn it in to glass?"

MP: I don't how much they tested that, but yeah. If that was, if that was your last way out, that would be kind of scary.

SB: In the event of an attack, what were the procedures that, um, you were to go through?

MP: Um, what we, I mean ...

SB: Let me rephrase that, if you were at Ellsworth.

MP: At Ellsworth, on the base, not on the site. Uh, what we, of course, we, we would hope that leading up to the attack we would know, and we would generate everything. Ah, we had designated shelters, if you will, where we would go to in the event of an attack. You know how protective they were, we didn't really expect to come out the other side, you know, after the fact. But yeah, we had shelters we would go to.

SB: So if you were on site?

MP: If you were on site? Uh, well, you had to prepare to, uh, get the missile ready to launch and then you were kind'a on your own. I mean, there was no real procedure, because you didn't want to stay on the site. Just the launching of the missile, or the incoming of something that was trying to take your missile out probably wouldn't make that the most safe place to be. So, uh, you'd go to an LCF and, and wait there.

SB: Go downstairs?

MP: Well, there wasn't room for many people downstairs. You wouldn't get in the capsule. You could go downstairs and stay in the, uh, elevator shaft.

SB: Were you ever down in the no lone zone?

MP: Sure, uh-hum.

SB: Eerie? I mean is it... what did you feel like when you went down there?

MP: Down in where the missile was?

SB: No I'm talking about in the capsule.

MP: Okay, it's, down in the capsule, it wasn't too bad. You get down underneath the capsule, it's kind of funny, it's just, I don't know [laughter], you know, you look at the way that thing is put together and it's just, it's just a little different. It's just not my favorite place to be.

SB: Uh-hum. You'd rather be down in the silo?

MP: Uh, I think I would probably rather be because I was more used to that area. I mean, we, that is where I spent more of my time was in the silo.

SB: Okay. Did you or your unit receive any awards or citations?

MP: Uh, I think we did. And, and for the life of me I couldn't tell you what it was. It was, uh, one of the President's or Unit Citations, or something like that.

SB: Um-hmm. Okay. Can you describe for me your most interesting dispatch?

MP: Yeah. [laughs] It was a Sunday. We came into work, normally Sundays were a fair, they weren't a real heavy maintenance day and you would try to get done what you could. This particular Sunday, we came into a dispatch where we had a site that was down and we had to change twelve Launch Facility batteries. If you, to put it into perspective, a Launch Facility battery weighs twelve hundred pounds. So it's a pretty good sized piece of equipment. And, if you've ever been in a Launch Facility, you know that

each battery is held down with shock mounts between each battery and just a lot of hardware holding them in, not to mention all of the cables that hook up to the batteries. So we came in Sunday morning, it was in the winter time, and you kind of hoped you got a light dispatch. So, it was the weekend [laughter]. This wasn't much of a weekend! Uh, so the site was one of the further ones away. It was Julie Four. I still remember it. It's out by Faith. So we loaded up a semi, and it took a semi trailer to haul these batteries out, that's how many, how heavy it was, along with a crane, uh, a utility vehicle, a five-ton vehicle just to carry all the tools and so forth that it took to do this. Uh, we had a crew of about six people. We went out there hoping to finish up and of course we didn't. So we, uh, we worked hard and we, uh, uh, you know we got done as much as we could and we went to rest at the Launch Control Facility. And the next day we went out and worked again and pretty much worked the majority of the day and came home that night. So, yeah, the memorable ones usually aren't very good! [laughter]

SB: So would that be your most vivid memory?

MP: Uh, I don't know if it's the most vivid memory. There's just so many. You know, talking about this brings back a lot of different memories. There was, I mean there was good times and bad times. I can remember going out on, as a supervisor of missile pull. Those were always interesting because you would ...

SB: And by missile pull, you mean extracting the?

MP: Extracting the missile from the silo. Uh, on one I was going out on missile installation. We left the base under some pretty snowy conditions and we got as far as the Mall and the vehicle started spinning. And we realized that we probably shouldn't be going to the field with that missile in tow! [laughter] So, we called our boss, and I don't know if he was real happy with us, but, uh, they arranged for a Highway Patrol escort so we could make a u-turn out in front of the Mall to bring that missile back to the base. But, uh, that ...

SB: Right out here on 90?

MP: Yeah! Right out here on I-90! They had to stop traffic, uh, in the east bound lane so we could pull this humongous vehicle around and bring it back.

SB: And did the people know what this was on the highway? I mean, was it ...

MP: Oh, I don't know if they knew or not. [laughter] If they had, then they probably wouldn't have been driving as close to us as they did!

SB: Any other memories?

MP: Uh, none right off hand.

SB: Okay. Did you ever drop one?

MP: Drop a ...?

SB: Missile?

MP: [laughter] No. [laughter] No.

SB: Well, uh, this probably just completed the next question and that's "Describe your most humorous missile field experience."

MP: [laughs] Well, that one was probably about as good as it gets as far as getting to stop traffic while we pulled the missile around on I-90.

SB: Okay. Any experiences with OZ, or Outer Zone or Inner Zone alarms? Uh, waiting for the OZ to set up? Did you ever get jacked up?

MP: No. I never got jacked up. And I'm glad.

SB: You want to explain to us what being jacked up ...?

MP: [laughs] Okay. If you get onto a site and for some reason. Part of your, there's a lot of security involved, obviously. There's a nuclear weapon on site. Part of the procedure is, if you're on the site, uh, there's an authentication process you go through. And you have, you're given an authentication number. Then you're also given a little sheet of paper that has, its, its secret. It's got all the numbers, one through zero, with a alphabetical letter associated with it. So you'd never use your number. You would say I'm working off of table such and such and I pass you. And then you'd authenticate with your number using Hotel, Charlie, Zulu, whatever letter corresponded to your numbers. Well, if per chance, you forgot your number, or you got the wrong number, or you got the wrong table, uh, that was a violation. And then they would send the security police team out to jack you up. They would, uh, have you stand along the fence in a basically "up-against-the-wall" type position, uh, until they could verify that you were who you were supposed to be. So, no, I did never get to do that [laughter] and I'm glad! Now as far as, there was IZ and OZ is Inner Zone security and Outer Zone security. Two different security systems that were on the site, both of which had to set up before you could leave the site. Uh, and I cannot remember, I can't count the number of times you'd wait for one to set up. You'd get one but not the other, so

you'd go on and you'd try to fix that. And then these, you know, you'd just sit out there, and if that was the case, you got to guard the site until a camper team or security team relieved you.

SB: Did you carry weapons to the site?

MP: You always had a security policeman that carried weapons.

SB: Ah. But you yourself did not.

MP: No.

SB: Not issued weapons.

MP: No.

SB: Did you know anybody who did get jacked up? Anybody on any of your ...?

MP: Oh, sure. [laughter] I mean they talked about it and the way they described it, it just didn't sound like a fun experience.

SB: Not a good time?

MP: Not a good time! Security policemen sometimes got a little rough with you when they're trying to get your I.D. card. So, I think they had, that was their chance to get back at us for whatever reason.

SB: What was a lockout?

MP: A lockout? You'd go out to a site and there were, as well as two different security systems, there were two different locks on the site: A circuit and B circuit. Each one had two combo dial locks. Uh, you wouldn't know the combination when you got out there. You would call the capsule crew, you would go through your authentication process, then they, through an authentication process would pass you back the combination on another table. They would pass you letters that you would convert to numbers and then you would go down and unlock the, the locks. Uh, there were two, two locks on each, each circuit, A circuit and B circuit, so you would think that you would always be able to open them. Well, it's not the case! Occasionally you couldn't get in at all. You could get one open but not the other. Uh, if you couldn't get the A circuit out then they would go through a process where they would try to go through a variety of combinations from previous combinations to current through future combinations to dial it out. Then if you couldn't dial it out, then you'd have to drill it out.

SB: Now, how often were those combinations changed?

MP: The combinations on the A circuit were changed every time they were taken out of the ground. And on the B plug, which is the large plug that goes down into the Launch Facility, that was changed once a year.

SB: Um hmm. Okay. Um, did you ever do maintenance in the capsule itself?

MP: Some maintenance in the capsule, yes.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: Where again the batteries, the, the motor generator in the capsules, the, those, the drawers in the electronic racks.

SB: And accompanied by security police then too?

MP: No. You didn't, you weren't accompanied by security police when you went to the capsule. You would, uh, they would check your identification. There was always a security team topside that would check your identification. Then you would authenticate to the capsule to get down into the capsule just like you would to get onto a site. And then the capsule crew would escort you while you were doing your maintenance on site.

SB: When did they adopt the Domino's motto?

MP: [laughter] I don't know. That's only on the one. I mean, each of them kind of had their own motto.

SB: Did they?

MP: Oh yeah. They each had their own little thing, but the Domino's was one of the catchier phrases.

SB: Oh that really struck me when I saw "Thirty minutes or next one's free." So, but they always had that sort of macabre humor?

MP: Absolutely!

SB: Way of relieving tension.

MP: I think it was a way of relieving tension, yeah.

SB: Okay. Um, let's see, did you observe or know of any launcher closures being blown open by the ballistic actuator? You said no?

MP: No.

SB: Right. Um, well then I guess you're not going to describe what happened when that occurs.

MP: No. I mean, they did, when I talked about a test that we did, we called it, uh, where we would actually send the launch commands to the site, and there were, I know of occasions when they did that particular test. I mean they lined up sand bags all behind the, the door to catch it when it rolled open.

SB: The lid?

MP: Yes.

SB: Oh. So you did know of those?

MP: Oh yes. I mean, we actually had tests where those were blown off, I'm sorry.

SB: Okay.

MP: I thought you meant accidentally blown off the doors.

SB: No.

MP: Yeah, we did have tests where they, where they blew the door open. Uh, and in order to get ready for those, I mean there were hundreds upon hundreds of sand bags that were stacked around ...

SB: Those were eighty ton doors!

MP: Huge door. And the thing that always made me wonder was here in western South Dakota when you get a blizzard, the snow packs so hard it's like concrete, but yet they said that a door would plow through the snow if it came to that. And that to me, I was always like "I'd just like to see it." I mean, I didn't want to see the after effect, but I would just like to see a door blow ...

SB: And you don't know if they ever tested one under those conditions?

MP: No. I don't know if they ever did.

SB: Okay. Um, are there any positive lessons, if you will, that could be learned from your experience in the missile business?

MP: Well, positive lesson? You know the fact that I really thought we needed those missiles to defend the country and they've been gone for five years now and the country's still here, would probably have to tell me that maybe we were over-armed a little bit. I mean ...

SB: Do we still have missiles?

MP: Oh sure. We have fewer warheads than we did when I came into this business. I mean all of the big birds used to have ten warheads on them. And the medium birds had three warheads. And we had one warhead. And we did away with 150 missiles here, 150 missiles in Missouri, and downgraded all the other missiles to one warhead. And, so I mean, we didn't need all those warheads. Yeah, we didn't need all those bombs, I guess.

SB: And then we still have the other two parts of the triad?

MP: Um hmm.

SB: The submarines and the aircraft?

MP: Right.

SB: Any negative lessons?

MP: No. I think for me it was a pretty positive experience. I can't say that I always felt that way at the time, but looking back I'd have to say that it was a positive experience. I mean, you're in the middle of a, of a cold day traveling to a site and you think "You know, there's got to be a better way of making a living." [laughter]

SB: What was your greatest challenge in accomplishing your mission?

MP: Sometimes it was just overcoming the elements and overcoming the distance that you had to travel to get to the, to the site. A lot of times it seemed like the process of loading your truck and driving to the site, getting in the site, when you're finished with work, closing the site back up, which was quite a process in itself. You know, getting everything put back the way it was, driving back and unloading, all of that was a bigger, uh, problem than actually doing the work. So distance was a real, a real impediment to getting the job done. Uh, and if you had a site go down, I mean it was the fact that you had to, it had to be maintained twenty-four hours a day, so, to just, I guess the distance and the knowing that you needed to have it done as soon possible all the time.



SB: Did you have any sense of boredom or repetition? Was that a problem for you?

MP: I really can't say that it was. I mean, I talk about the little bit of time I spent on an LCF. That was, that was kind of boring because you're, you're in a fenced in area and. But the few times I had to spend there, I can't say that it was. If you had a, if you waited for parts, you got out on site, you found the problem, it wasn't what you thought it was going to be, you didn't have the part you needed, again, because of that distance you sat there for hours upon hours waiting for you part to get there. That could be boring. For the most part, I can't say that my job was. I didn't have the, the problem such as, I'll give you an example of what I thought was a boring job was the camper team that sat out there for a full day guarding the site because security wasn't set up. I mean, and that was their job was to guard the site. There's not a lot of attacks going on in western South Dakota! [laughter]

SB: Yeah, I could see where that might be a problem in the summer, too!

MP: Um hmm.

SB: Uh, what do you consider to be your most significant accomplishment?

MP: I'd, well ...

SB: And you can speak you personally.

MP: I think the biggest feeling of accomplishment I got while I was out there was watching the new people come in that didn't, didn't have a good feel for what they were doing and watching them progress. Hopefully, maybe with something that I helped them with. Or as they just gained confidence and gained knowledge. I mean, they'd come in and they'd have all these questions and didn't understand it. And then you'd watch them and over the years they were answering the questions instead of asking them. So, I think my biggest feeling of accomplishment was watching those that maybe I helped along the way get to be better, uh, better technicians and just, you know, better ...

SB: You were a teacher.

MP: Well, I, part, I guess I was part of the time. Sure.

SB: That's nice to hear, coming from my perspective.

MP: Yeah.

SB: Um, often I've heard it said that, um, the greatest sense of accomplishment of people involved in the missile business was the fact that they never had to use them. Do you see it in that perspective?

MP: I think probably the fact we didn't have to use it, the fact that the time that I spent here, we didn't kill anyone through accident, negligence or whatever. The fact that we were able to take them down safely, on schedule. Didn't, again, didn't hurt anyone. And we put so many miles on. Just the driving alone was a hazard. A lot of really, really heavy maintenance going on. I mean the act of pulling a missile is in itself, it's just a, you almost have to see it to understand the, the seeing something this large pulled up into a ...

SB: Did you go out for any of the final extractions?

MP: Yes.

SB: Did you?

MP: Um hmm.

SB: Did it evoke emotion in you?

MP: Oh yes! I mean at that time I was still very much feeling a sense of loss at the system going away. But to go down into a site. The extraction probably wasn't as bad as after the fact there were certain items that had to be removed. Uh, so you would go into a site as it's being turned over to the contractor in basically a hull of what it was. Um, I mean you took so much pride in always making sure this site was picture perfect when you left it. And then you went down on that last time and it had been stripped of its parts and there were things here and things there and it would just, it was kind of an awful mess.

SB: You know, it sounds to me like a sailor who talked to about ...

MP: [laughter]

SB: well, about the decommissioning of his ship, you know! I mean it really does!

MP: Yeah. It's, I mean you develop this feeling of this is my job and you know, it's just drilled into you that you have to do it this way and that it has to be left in this perfect condition because, you know, it just has to be ready to go at a moment's notice. And then to go down and see it like that, that was, that was not the high point of my time here.

SB: Um hmm. Any personalities that you want to talk about? Any, uh, what we might call characters or colorful people?

MP: I'm sure there were some, and I'm not a real good storyteller, so I'm probably going to pass on that one. I mean there was just, you know, the people are what made the system and there were definitely some, some neat, neat people out there.

SB: How about any legends? Any folklore? Any ghosts?

MP: Of course! Let's see. And I don't remember what site it was and I don't guess it matters. But there was, there was a ghost on this site according to legend. And supposedly, you know, there had been a couple guys killed when this site was, was uh, erected, was built. And, and they, yeah, that there was always the talk that you'd go out there at night, there's a ghost on that site. So, yeah, there was some of that.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: Sure!

SB: Okay. Let me see. I've got a couple other questions for you and I think we'll be just about done.

MP: Okay.

SB: What do you think about the idea of preserving Delta One and Delta Nine as historic sites?

MP: Oh, I think it's a great idea. I mean, obviously from my standpoint it's nice to see a little bit of it preserved. It was never used, but it was there. It was definitely a part of history. It was definitely a part of the Cold War. So I think it's a great idea to have that set aside. I don't know if you can get a true picture of, of what it was in its glory, but at least you have an idea that it was a part of our history.

SB: Did you ever take your kids out to a site?

MP: I didn't take them to a site. I did take them to the Launch, there's a Training Launch Control, or a Training Launch Facility on the base, and I did have opportunity to take them through that. So you can, you know you always talk about these, the battery, the motor generator and the racks and they can put a little bit of an image with what it is your doing.

SB: Would you take them out to the new park?

MP: I think I probably would, yep, 'cause it's a neat thing to see. In fact, my son took a school trip with a, uh, uh, former capsule crew member who's now a teacher at Stevens High School. Had an opportunity to go out and tour Delta One. So that was kind of neat.

SB: Do you know who that is?

MP: The person's name?

SB: Yeah.

MP: Mike Norcross.

SB: Okay. What would you want the public to take from this national park?

MP: Well, you know, the system was just a system, but there were a lot of men and women that, uh, that gave a lot to maintaining it, to keeping it what it was, to guarding it, to, to, you know the operators that spent a big chunk of their life having it ready and making it a viable system.

SB: So you want a human element?

MP: Absolutely! Absolutely.

SB: Another question that I'm interested in is, do you think we should aid the Commonwealth of Independent States, what we call Russia now, should we aid them in developing a similar site?

MP: [laughs] Ooh, that's a tough one. Oh, I mean we've spent a lot of money trying to help them get their warheads put away. And at first I thought that was silly, but then the more I about, "Well, we wouldn't want them to fall into the wrong hands," so I can almost understand that. As far as helping them, I guess I'm not quite ready for that yet.

SB: Um hmm.

MP: Uh, you know, there's still that feeling of, uh, us against them if you will.

SB: Well, you spent your career with them as the enemy.

MP: Yeah. Exactly. Um hmm.

SB: Okay. Let's see here what I have left. I guess all I really have left, Marty, or Martin, is to ask you if you have any other comments? Or if there are questions I didn't ask you that you'd like to be asked?

MP: I really don't. That's, I don't have a whole lot more to say.

SB: Okay.

MP: I mean it was, there were times when you were working on it when you felt like it was just a, it was just a burden. I mean, it was taking you away from your family on a weekend. It was a holiday that you would much rather spend at home. It was a trip that you didn't want to take because it was cold and it was ugly outside. So I mean, it was all those things and yet it was, when it was going away, it was "How can they take it away?" So, it's kind of a, it was a wide variety of emotions with this particular system. I mean it was almost like a wife in itself that you had to, you know, you had certain obligations to. So it was, it was interesting to work on. It was, but as it was, it was decommissioned and taken away and torn down, you got to, you got the feeling that maybe this wasn't all there was to it. So it was, it was in that respect, it was a good time to break from the service also. So, for me it worked really well. You know, it was, it was a great way of life and it was a good time to go.

SB: Well, Chief Master Sergeant Pietz, I appreciate your time and the knowledge you've shared with us and thank you!

MP: You're welcome.

[End of interview]